

My dear Mr. Chairman:

I am increasingly troubled by a series of allegations to the effect that this Agency either actively participates, or knowingly acquiesces, in the illicit drug traffic in Southeast Asia. The allegations brought to our attention have been investigated and we have failed to uncover any evidence to support the charges. The most recent investigation, now near completion, was requested by Representative Les Aspin based on allegations made by Mr. Alfred W. McCoy, a graduate student at Yale University. None of Mr. McCoy's allegations have been substantiated. Certain of the allegations made are set forth in the enclosed.

The growth and traffic of illicit drugs within areas of Southeast Asia have existed for many, many years. Anyone with any understanding of the problem would know that maximum efforts for extensive periods will be necessary to bring the situation under control. Isolated instances will undoubtedly continue to occur regardless of the measures taken. The areas involved are very remote and most are under Communist control or sympathetic to the Communists. I reiterate, however, that this Agency has never participated in, condoned or in any way acquiesced in drug trafficking.

We have sought specific details as to the who, what, when and where underlying these accusations but the accusers have failed to produce evidence supporting their charges. However, accusation, rumor and suspicion based on these allegations continue to circulate and, unless refuted, will I believe do grave damage to the reputation for integrity and credibility of not only this Agency but of the entire American presence in important overseas areas.

As you know, it has long been our policy to refrain from responding publicly to the various allegations made against the Agency, whether they are based on honest ignorance and misunderstanding, or represent campaigns of calculated malice of domestic or foreign origin. Because of the seriousness and persistence of these charges, however, I concluded last year that our continued silence might lead sincere and responsible observers to give them some credence.

Accordingly in speaking to the American Society of Newspaper Editors on 14 April 1971 I stated that:

There is the arrant nonsense, for example, that the Central Intelligence Agency is somehow involved in the world drug traffic. We are not. As fathers, we are as concerned about the lives of our children and grandchildren as are all of you. As an Agency, in fact, we are heavily engaged in tracing the foreign roots of the drug traffic for the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs. We hope we are helping with a solution; we know we are not contributing to the problem.

As part of our effort to set the record straight, our Executive Director, Mr. W. E. Colby, has recently written to the editors of certain publications which have lent credibility to some of the allegations of concern to us. In these letters Mr. Colby has emphasized that the charges in question

Approved For Release 2005/06/09 : CIA-RDP74B00415R000400020001-1

have been most carefully investigated and found to be unsubstantiated. He quoted statements by responsive officials, including Mr. John E. Ingersoll, Director, Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, refuting the charges. He refuted point by point the article by Mr. McCoy in the July issue of Harper's magazine.

I had hoped that these assurances would set the record straight, at least in the minds of those who follow such matters seriously. However, I believe the allegations have now become so widespread that additional measures are called for.

For this reason, I am writing not only to tell you of my concern but to assure you that if you, or your Committee or your colleagues, have any continuing doubts about the Agency on this subject we will welcome an opportunity to answer any questions. I would also hope that if any other allegations of Agency involvement in illicit drugs are brought to your attention you will assist us in seeking the basis for such allegations so that we may determine their validity and origin.

Respectfully,

Richard Helms  
Director

Enclosure

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The attached is a suggested text of a letter from the Director to the Chairmen of our oversight Subcommittees. We would appreciate any comments or suggestions at your earliest convenience.

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John M. Maury  
Legislative Counsel